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ABSTRACT

This paper provides an overview of the Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI), a research-based instructional program designed to improve students' ability to read, understand, and communicate in English. The program focuses on pre- and inservice professional development for teachers who are trained in a highly structured, teacher-directed approach to instruction, with a focus on establishing high levels of student mastery, maintaining on-task behavior, and providing ample time for hands-on work and practice. ECRI is now used in hundreds of schools across the country. Teachers learn to teach word recognition skills, vocabulary, comprehension, study skills, spelling, penmanship, proofing, creative and expository writing, and literature. Sections of the paper discuss background, philosophy and goals, program components, evidence of effectiveness, professional development and support, implementation, costs, considerations, contact information, and policy issues and questions. (SR)

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Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI).

CS 014 119

S F. Walker

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Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI)

Background - Philosophy and Goals - Program Components - Evidence of Effectiveness
Professional Development and Support - Implementation - Costs - Considerations
Policy Issues and Questions - Resources

Topic or Category: Reading
Grade Level: K-6, or 1-12
Target Population: General, At-Risk, Special Education

OVERVIEW

Background and Scope:

Exemplary Center for Reading Instruction (ECRI) is a research-based, instructional program designed to improve students' ability to read, understand and communicate in English. Developed in the 1960s by former Utah school district administrator, Ethna Reid, the program focuses on pre- and inservice professional development for teachers. It is meant to strengthen and supplement, not replace, existing curricula. Teachers are trained in a highly structured, teacher-directed approach to instruction, with a focus on establishing high levels of student mastery, maintaining on-task behavior and providing ample time for hands-on work and practice.

Although used primarily to enhance reading and English language-arts instruction, the program also can be used to bolster instruction across all subject areas. ECRI is now in use in hundreds of schools across the country.

Philosophy and Goals:

The goal of ECRI is to improve elementary and secondary students' ability to use their language - to read fluently and with expression, to understand what they read and hear, and to use this understanding so they can communicate effectively. ECRI's philosophy is to move each student individually to learning mastery as quickly as possible, using a highly interactive and teacher-intensive approach to instruction.

Program Components:

ECRI is a pre- and inservice program for teachers to learn to teach word recognition skills, vocabulary, comprehension, study skills, spelling, penmanship, proofing, creative and expository writing, and literature.

ECRI's teaching methods focus on individualized instruction techniques and positive reinforcement. Teachers teach reading and other language skills using dialogues or directives written to make their teaching efficient, and strategies that are multisensory and sequential.

Criterion-referenced tests of mastery are written for the reading and/or content materials and are administered as students complete various activities.

Main features of ECRI:
Instructional Approach: Teachers are trained in the use of "directives" (scripted lessons), designed to increase student motivation, use class time more efficiently and introduce multisensory instructional techniques. Skills are taught in a careful sequence that attempts to move students to mastery at the fastest possible pace.

Teaching Methods: Teachers group students by reading level and, for 80 to 120 minutes daily, teach the groups using a three-step process: (1) The teacher demonstrates and models new skills for students. (2) The teacher prompts students to check for understanding. (3) During a practice period, students work individually with supervision, and teachers hold individual conferences, test for mastery and conduct small-group instruction for reteaching skills.

Student Mastery: High levels of student mastery are expected from all students. Students demonstrate mastery through class participation, small-group discussions, written work, and regular curriculum-based assessments.

Student Responsibility: ECRI requires each student to take active responsibility for and to help track his or her own learning.

Evidence of Effectiveness:

Summary of Effectiveness:
In describing the ECRI program, the American Federation of Teachers (AFT) states: "There have been more than 20 years of field tests to demonstrate ECRI's effectiveness in helping raise student achievement in reading and language arts, with benefits for students from all socioeconomic, racial and ethnic backgrounds" (AFT, 1998).

According to ECRI sources, regular education ECRI students demonstrate statistically greater gains on the reading subscales of standardized tests than (1) comparison group students receiving their regular reading instruction and (2) expectancies derived from national normative data. Special-needs ECRI students (Chapter I, bilingual, remedial) and special education students (learning disabled) demonstrate significantly greater-than-expected gains on the Total Reading composite scales of standardized achievement tests (ECRI, n.d.).

Additionally, researchers Robert Slavin and Nancy Madden (1989) reviewed three studies reporting on student progress through ECRI. Those studies' findings suggest ECRI could be an effective program for disadvantaged and low-achieving students.

Discussion of Evidence:
The U.S. Department of Education approved ECRI as a National Diffusion Network effective program in 1974 and reapproved it in 1990. ECRI submitted materials to the department's Program Effectiveness Panel for reapproval in 1996, but the panel was discontinued before it could act on the request.

All ECRI evaluations were conducted as part of school district testing programs. All studies used standardized achievement tests with established reliability and validity to evaluate ECRI's impact. In all cases, tests were administered according to the publishers' guidelines and data reported were machine scored. Achievement data have been reported for several groups of students in districts across the country.

Note: Data from all tests were converted to normal curve equivalents (NCEs) as required by the U.S. Department of Education. For any test, at any grade, an NCE score of 50 is "average" and thus equals grade level. Although it is not totally accurate, NCE gains can be thought of as approximating percentile gains.

Evaluation data, as provided by ECRI, include the following:

1. 1990 Evaluation
The standardized achievement tests used included the Stanford Achievement Test (SAT), California Test of Basic Skills (CTBS), Iowa Test of Basic Skills (ITBS), Woodcock-Johnson and the Nelson-Denny. The latter two were used only with a small proportion of the children in special education in one school and a larger proportion of the bilingual children in another.

The study covered 11 public school sites and 2,274 children in regular education, special education,

remedial education, bilingual education and Chapter I schools from coast to coast. In addition, two districts provided control schools. Results from the study include the following:
Regular education students (n=1733) gained four to 28 NCEs in vocabulary and comprehension (see definition of NCE above), which was significantly greater ($p<.01$) than the control schools or expectancies from normative data.
Children with special needs (bilingual, Chapter I and remedial) showed NCE gains ranging from 5.9 to 27.8 with an average gain of 14 NCEs. Students in special education showed gains between 7.3 and 24.9 NCEs, with an average gain of 19 NCEs.
Looking only at the schools with controls, the experimental schools gained between 8 and 14 NCEs in vocabulary and comprehension, the control schools ranged between a loss of 9 NCEs and a gain of 6 NCEs in vocabulary and comprehension.

2. 1996 Evaluation
New validation data were collected during the 1992-93 and 1995-96 school years and reported in 1996. The 1996 study covered six sites (five public, one private) in five states and 1,986 children. One Chapter I school also provided an additional control school that maintained its original program. Students were from a range of socioeconomic backgrounds and varied in ethnicity, race and urban/rural background. In 1996, all schools used the SAT or the ITBS. Results from the study include the following:
Gifted, regular education, special needs and special education experimental students in six different national sites demonstrated significant gains ($p<.01$) on the reading subtests of standardized achievement tests. Average gains per class across all schools and groups ranged from 5.4 NCEs to more than 26 NCEs.
One district provided two experimental schools and one control school, in grades 2-5. All experimental classes made small gains in comprehension and total reading between one and eight NCEs. In the control school, all classes showed small losses in both comprehension and total reading, ranging from a loss of two NCEs to a loss of nine NCEs.
In North Carolina, where 10 teachers, 400 students and three administrators have been involved in the ECRI program, average score gains were reported to exceed 2.5 years per year enrolled. Anecdotal data indicated a reduction in behavior problems.

Summary of the 1990 and 1996 Studies Combined
Converting these scores to grade-level gains, averaging them across grades and combining the 1990 and 1996 studies, regular education students, after one year of ECRI instruction in grades 1-2 gained two years; regular education students in grades 4-6 averaged two years and three months gain; and regular education students in grades 7-12 averaged two years and five months gain (Reid, 1997).

Professional Development and Support:

Teachers are provided with a five-day seminar on basic ECRI techniques for reading and language arts instruction, effective scheduling of class time, and methods for diagnosing and correcting reading problems. During the seminar, participants observe demonstrations, teach sample lessons and pass proficiency tests on the use of new approaches. Intermediate and advanced seminars also may be contracted. In addition, ECRI staff are available to visit implementation sites to demonstrate and/or monitor implementations (AFT, 1998).

Implementation:

This program is designed to work with existing reading/language arts materials. Participating teachers must have 21 required instructional texts for training and subsequent reference, student skill mastery tests and a folder with record forms for each student. Instructional texts contain teacher directives (scripts), research-based rationale for practices, and proficiency checklists.

Costs:

For a school of 500 students, start-up costs are estimated at under $7,000, including a $600-per-day honorarium for the ECRI trainer and $228 per teacher for required teacher texts.

Average initial costs are estimated, based on 35 teachers in a seminar, as follows:
Workshop cost: $268 per teacher for ECRI texts (plus prorated travel costs and honoraria); $13 per student cost of workshop, assuming 35 teachers in a seminar and a class size of 25.

Recurring costs: $5 per class, per year beyond normal classroom costs without ECRI (assuming schools reproduce their own consumable materials. The costs do not include recurring costs for replacing existing materials.) (Reid, 1997)

Considerations:

The American Federation of Teachers, which includes ECRI among it's *"Seven Promising Reading and Language Arts Programs,"* states:

"At the heart of ECRI's remarkable record of success is an effective and replicable professional development program..... Teachers and paraprofessionals should be aware of - and prepared for -- ECRI's fast pace, as well as its use of scripted 'directives.' It is important to stress, however, that it is not the directives but the proper training in their use and the instructional techniques they embody that account for the program's success..... In short, this is a cost-effective mastery learning program that, through extensive field testing, has been shown to help raise student achievement across all grade levels." (AFT, 1998)

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Policy Issues and Questions:
How can states help districts and schools choose the most appropriate reading programs to improve students' skills and performance? What information and assistance would be useful?
Should states promote particular reading programs for districts and schools to use?
How can a reading program's track record be checked and validated?
What criteria should states and districts use to invest in various reading programs initially and for the long term?
How should policymakers weigh the benefits of a reading program versus its cost and required resources?
Can a balance be struck between effectiveness and efficiency?
What state policies can help improve teacher training and professional development so teachers are better equipped to help all students read successfully?

Resources:
American Federation of Teachers (1998). *Building on the Best, Learning from What Works: Seven Promising Reading and Language Arts Programs.* Washington, DC: AFT.

American Federation of Teachers (1998). *Building on the Best, Learning from What Works: Five Promising Remedial Reading Intervention Programs.* Washington, DC: AFT.

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